

Indian Birds' in ten chapters, published in the Society's *Journal*, Vols. 33 to 35, Whistler remarked (Vol. 33; 784) 'Birds as a class are believed to have little or no sense of smell'.

Here we are in 1950 A.D. and this matter of Scenting Power of Birds undecided! Vultures, eagles, falcons, hawks, kites, crows; geese, ducks, junglefowls, domestic fowl, pheasants, partridges, parrots are all to be found in the several zoological gardens of this country. It should not be too difficult to have blinkers-caps made to fit the species of birds to be 'investigated' and so find out what scenting power is possessed by each of them for the food they are accustomed to eat.

A suggestion is that, given the necessary interest in the matter, it should not be too difficult for naturalists, aided by the several superintendents of the zoological gardens (who would doubtless afford all help and facilities) to carry out the experiments and make the essential careful notes in each case.

As to birds scenting human beings photographers taking photographs from 'hides' do not seem to bother much about that!

What is needed is an expert investigation of the kind carried out by Capt. Allen Payne regarding 'The Sense of Smell in Snakes' which was published in Vol. 45 (pp. 507-515) of the Society's *Journal*.

BANGALORE,
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23. CHANGES IN SCIENTIFIC NAMES OF INDIAN BIRDS

The occasion of the publication in the *Journal* of my 'Birds from Nepal 1947-1949' [49 (3) 1950; 355-417] prompts me to write and to attempt to explain to the members of the Society why I have apparently departed so radically from the system of nomenclature familiar to many students of Indian birds who work with the 'Fauna' series.

In a previous number of the *Journal* [47, (4) 1948; 790] it was announced that the Honorary Editor, Mr. Sâlim Ali and the undersigned proposed to start a five-volume handbook on Indian birds. It has been agreed between us that the first priority in this cause should be given to the completion of a Handlist of the Indian birds, and this I have been currently at work on for some time. The urgency of this work is manifest to professional workers. The standard work on Indian birds, the 'Fauna' series, published between 1922 and 1930, was an attempt to modernize the treatment of Indian birds previously revised in 1889. And yet much of the work of Mr. E. C. Stuart Baker which made these volumes admirable lay along other lines from those of bringing the nomenclature up to date. In effect, a good deal of this technical side of the work was already outdated on its publication.

Ornithology is by no means a regional subject, but unfortunately some world areas have suffered from regionalism. There are the International Codes and Rules of Nomenclature, and of course workers of many other nationalities to be reckoned with in the systematic study of birds. It is today a quite outmoded process to attempt to work in a vacuum without regard to these outside and stimulating influences.

Since the publication of the last edition of the 'Fauna' series, there has been a great spate of systematic ornithological research, partially inspired by the recent advances in genetics and in ethology. New theories of the technics of evolution have come to light, and in addition at present there is an outstandingly active generation of professional ornithologists. These workers today are publishing papers on families and lesser groups of birds often rather removed from the Indian sub-region, but which bear by implication on Indian systematic problems. A study of African bulbuls, for example, may reveal relationships in that group which require the suppression of a generic name. The combined genus may have two identical specific or subspecific names requiring under the International Rules, the suppression of the latter of the two, with the consequent introduction of some little-known previously suppressed old name, or the erection of a new name. These tedious, extraneous and troublesome details (from a field naturalist's point of view) have to be ironed out and brought up to date if nomenclature as such is to continue to exist.

So much for changes in names. The question of the order in which birds should be listed is perhaps even more arbitrary. The class Aves is a great mushroomed, sprawling aggregation of families, some obviously related, others of questionable relationship, which is certainly not subject to linear arrangement. No proper family tree can be diagnosed. The mere listing of birds means running out each branch to the terminal twigs, and then retracing one's steps back to the main trunk to seek the next nearest branch in the order, and so on and on. Personal opinion obviously enters as regards which branch to follow first, second and so on.

The order itself has changed a great deal. That followed by the immortal 'Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum' may still be preferred by some. Others may choose that of Hartert in his 'Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna'. Currently among students of world birds it seems that most do or will follow the order and arrangement of families proposed by Wetmore and followed largely by Mr. J. L. Peters in his 'Check-List of Birds of the World' (Harvard University Press, seven volumes now published). This arrangement commences with the most primitive families and leads up to the most advanced, though as to the exact sequence to follow there will probably continue to be arguments for many generations to come. This is the order being followed by authors working on checklists of neighbouring areas such as Burma (Smythies), the Indo-Chinese subregion (Deignan), Indo-China (Delacour), Malaya (Gibson-Hill) and Ceylon (Phillips). It seems far wiser, therefore, to make a definite and thoroughgoing break with the traditional arrangement of Indian bird families and swing into line with the main stream of world opinion on such matters. Only harm will be done by continuing to remain in the old mould, (and this I say consciously, as a distant kinsman on my mother's side of A. O. Hume). It is for the above reasons that I have been bending every effort to bring the Indian Handlist up to date, and to speed its appearance.

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July 28, 1951.

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